

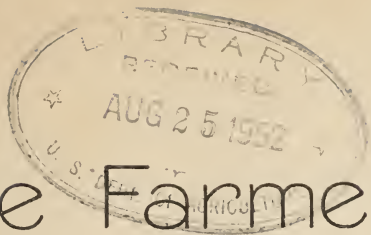
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# The Farmers RUN THEIR SHOW



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
AGRICULTURAL ADJUSTMENT ADMINISTRATION



## THE FARMERS RUN THEIR SHOW

By CHESTER C. DAVIS, Administrator, Agricultural Adjustment Act

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OUT OVER the United States, in thousands of farm communities, an evolution of far-reaching importance is taking place, as farmers by the millions organize to take advantage of the opportunities created through the Agricultural Adjustment Act.

The question is: Can the old-fashioned democratic processes be successfully used by the farmers to bring order out of economic chaos? The outcome of this experiment, if successful, may give part of the answer to the Twentieth Century riddle—how to preserve democracy in the machine age.

The Agricultural Adjustment Act was a recognition by Congress that farmers have certain economic rights, that as one of the great groups in our population performing essential services for the Nation, they are entitled to a fair exchange value of their products. Along with the definition of these rights, Congress set up certain mechanisms of adjustment which farmers must operate if they are to improve their position. After a year under the act, nearly 3,000,000 farmers are participating in adjustment programs, which are one of their mechanisms.

### DROUGHT EMPHASIZES NECESSITY FOR PLANNING

In recent weeks, the unprecedented drought, assuming in some areas the proportions of a major disaster, has emphasized more than ever before the necessity for agricultural planning. Except for the assistance afforded by the production-adjustment programs, the farmers this year would have been victims of the whims of the elements. Through the crop-income insurance features of the adjustment plans, cooperating farmers will receive an income this year whether they get a crop or not. Benefit payments are not based on current but on average production. Hence, through these programs, the farmers have a chance to continue in business. The real aim of adjustment is continuity of production up to the market possibilities, with flexibility permitting the reduction of surpluses when they exist and the maintenance of production when needed.

Agricultural adjustment is concerned with all of the forces which, uncontrolled, render the farmer's livelihood precarious. The Administration is making every effort to alleviate the suffering caused by the drought. Also, through its campaign for less land in crops and more land in pasture and forage, it is taking measures to



prevent future destruction of soil fertility by wind erosion. Meanwhile, in planning the adjustment program for 1935 and 1936, advantage will be taken of the flexible nature of the Adjustment Act to offset to every possible extent the effects of the drought.

Emergency developments like the drought also emphasize the importance of the county production control associations in supervising the details of adjustment, because the associations are the real implements of economic democracy, and the need of such democracy is always most acute in emergency. This work of the associations must continue if the machinery of the adjustment programs is to operate.

The Administration recently made a survey to discover just what is happening in the operation of these programs. This information was gathered before the drought became acute, but it applies even more pertinently now to all those most important phases of the adjustment program involving local control.



Interest in the corn-hog program brought large attendance at the educational meetings when the contract was explained.

Unquestionably, millions of farmers, accustomed to going their own way and disregarding their fellows, are giving up their old-style individualism. They are learning the central truth of the New Deal philosophy—that the welfare of the individual is dependent on the welfare of the group. They are not only learning this truth, but they are putting it into practice in a concrete way as they assume the huge tasks and heavy responsibilities of production adjustment.

#### FARMERS WORKING TOWARD COMMON GOAL

Representatives of the Adjustment Administration who work in or have visited the farm areas cannot escape the feeling that something significant and of permanent social value is developing there. The

farmers themselves may be scarcely conscious of this. The fact is that they have their backs to the wall and are fighting desperately for the simple right to make a livelihood from the soil. They are primarily concerned with "equality for agriculture"—their goal for many years. But, as shoulder to shoulder they tackle the diverse and knotty problems of the adjustment programs, they find that there is such a thing as economic self-government. They discover that by organizing along democratic lines, they can bring law and order into the economic realm, just as the pioneers, through their elected officers and their duly established courts, brought law and order to the lawless frontier. The drought has brought this out, because it has led to social action on a new scale, and against the most cruel forces of nature. But the necessity for collective effort also was recognized before the drought.

### FOR THE FARMERS, BY THE FARMERS, AND OF THE FARMERS

A corn-hog committeeman in a midwestern State told a representative of the Administration: "We have emphasized, in correspondence, through the press, in meetings, and on the radio, that the program is for the farmers, and is administered by the farmers and of the farmers."

That is the up-to-date expression of the ideal to which Abraham Lincoln in another stressful hour gave voice. And somehow one gains confidence that, with the common people thus dedicating their efforts, the Nation will survive the dark years of the 1930's just as it did those of the 1860's.

All through the cotton, tobacco, and rice lands of the South, and the corn and wheat lands of the West and East, the farmers are busily working out the problems raised by the adjustment programs. One of the most important of these programs is that involving nearly 1,200,000 corn-hog producers. Reduction contracts have been signed by growers in each of the 48 States, with the Corn Belt proper leading the way in degree of participation. This region, which has been termed "the valley of democracy" affords a closeup view of the functioning of this new kind of self-government.

Long-established farm organizations have largely forgotten their differences and united behind the adjustment program. Along with the members of such organizations are thousands of unorganized farmers, customarily skeptical about the advantages of "belonging"; who look upon this program as a realistic and effective attack on their problems.

After the initial sign-up was completed last winter, when the farmers pledged themselves to reduce their corn acreage by 20 percent and the number of hogs farrowed by 25 percent, the signers formed "county corn-hog production-control associations" to take charge of the further details of the program. The signers in each township met to elect a township chairman and a permanent township committee, replacing the temporary committee. Chairmen from the several townships, sitting together, constitute the county board. The boards of the county production-control associations work through special committees, one of the most important of which is the allotment committee, charged with checking and adjusting individual farmers' allotments.



In many townships, there were spirited contests in the elections of permanent committees, often decided by only 1 or 2 votes. Attendance ranged as high as 70 or 80 percent of the eligible signers.

"Our town meetings haven't aroused as much interest in 50 years", reported A. J. Streid, one of the contract signers in McLean County, Ill. "The men in our township thought this was the fair way to handle it, and they were satisfied when it was over."

Sometimes there were 12 or 15 nominations, in which case the 3 highest on the first vote were the nominees, and the farmers balloted till someone got a majority.

One man who electioneered for the post of township chairman discovered later that there was work as well as honor connected with it.

"I don't know what was the matter with me", he told an Adjustment Administration worker. "I thought I wanted on this committee."



A township committee at work in Vance Township, Vermilion County, Ill. Left to right: M. J. Tithe, W. H. Catlett (chairman), I. W. Rowand, Theora Catlett. Miss Catlett, 18 years old, has worked with her father in all stages of the corn-hog program.

Officials of the production-control associations are not mere figure-heads. They carry heavy responsibility and wield considerable power. They make decisions having an important bearing on the affairs of individual farmers. Naturally these men have come to occupy prominent places in their communities.

"The name of the president of the county control association is spoken more times in a day than the name of the county treasurer is spoken in 2 months", said an Iowa man.

Local leadership in the counties and townships naturally has gravitated to men who were outstanding.

"In every county of Iowa you can find farmers of college education", reported Ralph Smith, secretary of the State corn-hog com-



mittee. "I don't think you could go out and select at random a finer group than the corn-hog committeemen of Iowa."

A county agent in Indiana, describing the long hours put in by the township committeemen in his county, declared: "If this were a bureaucratic program imposed on the farmers from above, the Government could not hire people to work the way these men are working."

In Kosciusko County, Ind., which had no county agent, the campaign was led by J. A. Melott, a farmer and president of the county farm bureau. Mr. Melott became emergency agent for his county, and our reports show that he got 1,800 contracts, covering more than 80 percent of the corn and hog production.

### NEW LEADERS BEING DEVELOPED

Where several commodity programs, such as those for wheat, corn-hogs, and tobacco, have been carried out in a single county, a different group of men has been placed in charge of each project, and thus some new leaders hitherto unknown, have been developed.

Farmers have watched closely to see that their elected representatives were faithful. One county chairman in Nebraska was recalled by the farmers, who claimed he was "pushing himself too much", and another was elected in his place.

For the most part the county boards and township committees recognize their jobs and are doing them. They have undertaken their arduous and complex tasks with a fine sense of responsibility. They have made courageous revisions of allotments and yield appraisals. They have personally signed notes to obtain from local banks funds with which to operate their associations pending the receipt of money from the Government. They have wrestled with county budgets, publication of the production reports in local newspapers, and a host of other details which often have kept them burning the midnight oil. Some committeemen, though they are paid a modest "per diem" for their services, are actually losing money because they are unable to look after their own farm work properly. Many of them do not bother to charge mileage, contributing their gasoline and the use of their cars to the cause. The board members are subject to call at any instant.

In reconciling local production figures with those of the State and Federal statisticians, the committees have preferred not to make flat percentage reductions, on the ground this would penalize the ones who tried hardest to be accurate and fair.

"We are going over all the contracts with a fine-tooth comb, and we'll make our own adjustments", said one Indiana committeeman. "We don't want to be hard-boiled, but we feel it's necessary to bear down. Otherwise we won't get any reduction, and we won't be any further ahead."

A spirit of give-and-take is often manifest. In Benton County, Iowa, the 20 township chairmen voted unanimously to equalize the corn-yield figures, with 11 townships making some sacrifice on behalf of the other 9.

In the early stages of the corn-hog campaign, many farmers misunderstood the manner of operation of the hog-processing tax, and

concluded that they were paying it themselves. Officials in Washington explained that the hog-processing tax finances the benefit payments which are in addition to price; that hog prices have been higher in nearly every week since the processing tax went into effect than they were the corresponding week a year previous, so that the farmers get more in price and their benefit payments besides; and that as production comes under control the tax has less and less effect upon producer price. But it remained for some of the farmers themselves to make the most telling replies to the complainers. Mr. Melott told about a farmer who last winter claimed he was paying the hog-processing tax.

### FARMERS ANSWER THE CRITICS

"I said to him, 'No, I don't figure it exactly that way. Do you know what the price of hogs was a year ago? No? Well, you haven't got anything to say, then. I know what the price was a year ago today, a year ago last week and a year ago next week. I know the price of hogs is higher now than it was a year ago, when there wasn't any processing tax, and there are more hogs coming to market now than there were then.' That quieted him down."

The corn-hog program, involving two interrelated commodities, was necessarily complex, and more than 50 administrative rulings had to be issued from Washington to take care of the problems which came up. But the farmer committeemen appear to have recognized the inherent difficulty of the problem, and have struggled to grasp the complexities of these rulings and apply them to their own counties and townships. Individual farmers, too, found difficulty in getting their records together, so as to give conclusive evidence of their production. Their patience must have been as the patience of Job, for they have stayed with the program.

A surprisingly large proportion of the farmers consider the benefit payments a secondary part of the project. In Iowa the State and county committees placed the emphasis entirely on the advantages from control of production. In Nebraska, where the wheat program preceded the corn-hog program, something of this same point of view came to be held.

Louis Jochum, president of the Lincoln County association, told an Administration representative that, "The farmers now have the idea of self-help, rather than just the benefit payment."

And O. K. Duckworth, of Frontier County, Nebr., formerly an executive of an automobile acceptance company and now a farmer active in both the wheat and corn-hog programs, declared: "We've got to hold production in control, even if the money doesn't come from Uncle Sam."

The program has thus far been remarkably free from the entanglements of politics, though here and there local politics has cut some figure.

Frank Walker, president of the Lancaster County, Nebr., association, reported: "The program has been nonpartisan and nonpolitical. If it had been political, it would not have worked out."

Alva Zieme, president of the Furnas County, Nebr., wheat association, said: "I'm not a Democrat. I have always been a Repub-

lican, and my father was a Republican. But if this will help the country, I think we should all get in and help."

In scope of participation by producers, the adjustment program has far surpassed all previous attempts at concerted farm action. Iowa, for example, was represented in the sign-up with 95 percent of its corn and hog production. Table precinct in Lincoln County, Nebr., had a 100 percent corn-hog sign up. A number of Illinois counties had more than 2,000 contracts each, and one, McLean County, had more than 3,600.



Joseph J. Ford, of Flat Rock, Ill., believed to be the oldest adjustment contract signer in the United States. He will be 102 years old in July 1934. "Looks like Roosevelt has some sense", says Mr. Ford.

The oldest signer is believed to be Joseph J. Ford, of Flat Rock, Ill., who will be 102 years old next July 26. "Uncle Joe" raised an average of 80 hogs a year for 80 years—always white ones, for he "wouldn't have a black hog on the place." He is a staunch supporter of President Roosevelt.

"Looks like Roosevelt has some sense", he said.

Women, too, have had an important part. In Vance Township, Vermilion County, Ill., the chairman, W. H. Catlett, was assisted throughout all phases of the campaign by his 18-year-old daughter, Theora. And beneficiaries of the program include the youngest children.

In the cases of farms occupied by tenants, the corn-hog contract had to be signed by both owner and tenant. Sometimes the land



owner was at a distance, and papers had to be forwarded. One woman who owned land in Iowa sent her power of attorney from Tokyo, Japan, where she now lives.

Every locality, of course, has its peculiar characteristics. These often come to light in connection with the reasons given by people who stay out of the program. Sometimes there are personal situations in the county which lead certain farmers to join the rank of dissenters. Occasionally the influence of religious sects has been felt, as in Indiana when a rumor spread that signing the contract might involve military service.

The campaign has not been without its humorous episodes. One Nebraska farmer wrote on his contract: "Twenty hogs died and went to heaven."

The allotment committee wrote a note, attached it to the contract, and returned it to the farmer, saying: "Supporting evidence needed. Please get affidavit from St. Peter."

Another Nebraska farmer, wishing to have as large a base as possible, included some hogs which had strayed into a neighbor's corn and had been shot. Apparently the neighbor no longer was in a revengeful mood, because he readily signed an affidavit, acknowledging himself as the killer of the hogs.

#### MAJORITY OF FARMERS COOPERATING

In many counties more than 90 percent of the farmers are taking part in the program. Those who for one reason or another do not come in appear to fall into three or four main categories—tenant farmers whose landlords refuse to sign the contract; farmers on poor land whose production is so small they are virtually on a subsistence basis; farmers who would like to participate but who are prevented by some special complication; and farmers who are suspicious of the Government and object to being restricted in any way. One man is reported to have declared that "when he couldn't run his own business any longer, he'd turn it over to the Government."

Community opinion exerts strong pressure against the willful non-cooperators, but there is an attitude of tolerance toward those who would like to participate and are unable to do so. This community pressure seems to generate spontaneously. Officials in Washington have carefully avoided encouraging it. Here and there are farmers who advocate compulsion for the nonsigners, but this sentiment seems by no means universal in the Middle West.

Opposition to the program is fostered in some areas by partisan political leaders, in others by processors, and in others by newspapers or magazines not in sympathy with the adjustment program. For the most part this kind of opposition appears to have had little effect, judging by the proportion of farmers who are cooperating.

Fears and rumors of various kinds, with little basis in fact, have operated as handicaps to the sign-up in some localities. Perhaps most widespread has been the fear that the Government would not actually make the benefit payments. Some stories that the Government was about to impose a compulsory plan have been spread.



Another rumor was that the Government would place unemployed people on the contracted acres. But the effect of such misstatements has in most cases been temporary, and the failure of one after another of these dire predictions to materialize has caused the farmers to develop a general skepticism of bear stories.

The adjustment programs have affected the farm communities in many important ways. First of all, of course, there is the increase in farm income which is so desperately needed. Low prices, continuing year after year, and the danger of losing their farms through foreclosure, had brought many farmers to the depths of despair. In some areas, three successive years of drought and crop failure had added to their misery. Probably nowhere are the benefit payments more appreciated than in these drought areas.



Farmers are showing their business ability as they wrestle with papers, records, and figures.

A second important effect of the programs is to make farmers more business-like in their operations.

"They've had to get down to business about their own affairs", Frank Walker of Nebraska told an A.A.A. worker. "They have to know how many hogs they're selling, how much corn they're growing, and so on."

To assist farmers in keeping the necessary records about their production, a simplified farm account book has recently been prepared and issued by the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the Extension Service. Many county agents have found it possible also to interest the farmers in account books of a more complete nature.

The appraisals of the contracted land for corn yield have caused many farmers to learn things about their own land they did not know before—why their land does not produce as much corn per acre as

their neighbor's, how soil-building crops like alfalfa and sweet-clover will build up its fertility, and what production methods they may use to bring up their acre yields.

Measuring up the land set aside, and making certain that it is the right proportion of the entire land used for cultivation of the crop on the farm has helped to set a new standard of exactness for many farmers. This is said to have been especially important in areas like western Nebraska, where the original Government survey was none too accurate.

The adjustment programs have been a means of bringing back some pageantry into farm life, and restoring the old spirit of neighborliness. In Illinois several counties held celebration banquets when all the contracts were assembled and ready to send off to Washington. More than 1,000 persons attended such a banquet in Iroquois County. Other banquets have been held for the community committeemen.

Evidence that the programs have fostered a cooperative attitude on the part of the farmers is found in the counties of western Nebraska, where both wheat and corn are important crops. A number of these counties reported that the corn-hog sign-up last winter was much easier than the wheat sign-up a year ago. The fact that the wheat checks really materialized was an added reason for this.

"Men said last winter, 'Never will get them wheat checks! Never will get them wheat checks!'" related O. W. Pflum, of Chase County. "But when the checks came, the farmers saw the Government meant business, and the corn-hog program was easy."

A peculiar phenomenon was that not long ago, when Dr. Wirt was charging in Washington that the farmers were being "regimented", the farmers of the corn and wheat belts paid slight attention. These charges seemed to be remote from their own affairs, and they were too busy to give the matter much thought.

"I have found business men in Iowa who think the adjustment program came from Washington", Ray Anderson, agricultural editor of the Cedar Rapids (Iowa) Gazette, has told us. "But the farmers themselves think of this as their program. God help us when they get out of this idea. You can't shove anything down an Iowa farmer's throat—not this generation anyway. The minute anything like that is tried, he backfires. He is a peculiar individual. If he likes you, he likes you all over. If he doesn't, God help you."

#### "REGIMENTATION" NOT ADMITTED BY FARMERS

Similar views were expressed by Ralph Smith, secretary of the Iowa Corn-Hog Committee.

"The cry of 'regimentation'", he declared, "has been capitalized on by those who from the beginning have fought the program. It has been used as a straw man to scare people and keep them from signing. But it has not been taken seriously by the farmers of Iowa."

There seems to have been considerable self-regimentation by the farmers, however. Take Nebraska, for example. Of the 120,000 farmers of the State, 99,000 attended community meetings in the

first 10 days of the educational campaign last January, because they wanted to know all about the corn-hog program.

Reports from some of the wheat areas, where the wheat program has been in operation since last summer, read like the "before and after" testimonials of patent medicine advertisements.

"When the wheat program was first announced", said W. C. Radcliff, of Chase County, Nebr., "no one in our county was going to sign up. They were afraid because the wheat pool, the Farm Board, the Non-Partisan League, and every other effort had failed. They had been joining things for 15 years, and had only got deeper in the hole. Well, we persuaded 481 of them to sign up, and this spring, when the lists were opened again, 38 more signed. They said, 'We ought to have come in last fall.'"



Filling out the contracts with the necessary production figures is a task that is not taken lightly.

In view of the drought, the slowness in the advance of farm income after long years of distress, and the necessity for further improvement, the farm problem is not yet solved for the wheat producers, but on the whole they appear to be glad they are taking part in the program, and are pleased by the start toward recovery. There are individual cases of acute dissatisfaction over the manner of handling contracts. Doubtless similar cases of dissatisfaction will develop later on in connection with the corn-hog program.

Comparisons with previous efforts to assist farmers are frequently made.

"The farmers are getting a taste of good government, and it will be pretty hard to satisfy them with anything less", said Mr. Radcliff.

If the adjustment program should suddenly be canceled, what would the attitude of the farmers be?



"Oh, I couldn't even guess", said L. Marshall Vogler, a member of the Indiana State corn-hog committee. "The Democratic Party would have to run and jump into the two oceans."

"If the program were dropped now, we'd all have to leave the country", said John Cherveney, a member of the Tama County (Iowa) allotment committee.

Even delays and periods of silence on the part of the Government or local officials bring disappointment to the farmers. One of them remarked, "When the farmers out in the country don't hear anything for a couple of weeks, they begin to say, 'Well, I guess that darned thing's fell through.'"

But words of progress are passed along to them, and their patience is extended.

In handling the adjustment programs at the local end, there are myriad minor complications, and some major ones. Human nature is human nature everywhere.



Many questions arise which must be answered by the committee.

#### COUNTY CONTROL ASSOCIATIONS ARE MAJORITY ORGANIZATIONS

A midwestern farm paper in a recent editorial discussed the problems of the local control associations, as follows:

Running a county control association is a difficult job. Many of those trying to do it don't realize how difficult it is or why it is difficult. That makes it harder. \* \* \* The reason is simple enough. No officer in any farm organization has ever had any experience in dealing with an organization representing 90 to 95 percent of the farmers in the township and county. All of our old farm organizations are minority organizations. There have always been more farmers who didn't belong to the leading organization in the county than there were farmers who did belong. In actual practice, that meant that a group of farmers who thought about alike on various subjects could run the organization, elect their friends to office and



handle affairs with no consideration for the views of the outsiders. If there were some dissenters on the inside, they could quit being members. And often the dissenters did quit. \* \* \* If the minority had happened to be the majority, they would have done the same thing. \* \* \*

They have to learn to get along together. When an election is held and policies adopted, the winners need to make sure that the minority is represented on the board and that the policies selected are enough of a compromise so that both majority and minority will approve and support them. When a question comes up and 60 percent vote "yes" and 40 percent vote "no", that shouldn't settle the issue. Both parties should work to get a compromise plan that will draw a 90 percent "yes" vote. Instead, too often the majority pushes things through in a high-handed way and the minority quits or sulks and gets ready for revenge at the next election. Both are at fault. If county control associations succumb to weaknesses of this sort, they will be torn wide open and the whole adjustment program will fail.

In the last analysis, the whole program for raising farm income turns on whether farmers in their own local associations can become familiar enough with the facts to decide on policies intelligently, and whether they can learn how to work together skillfully enough to administer the programs decided upon. \* \* \* For all of us, it's a new job. It's a hard job. It can be handled only if we recognize its difficulty and its importance and still resolve to conquer it. \* \* \*

#### FARMERS ARE ALERT TO NEEDS OF THE TIME

One final word. At this point, some readers will lay down the paper and say, "Jim Brown ought to read this. The way he's been acting, nobody could get along with him." Let us remind the reader that Jim Brown may be thinking the same thing about you. Both of you may be hard customers to do business with. That can't be helped. You've got to learn to get along together. Your income and future of your children depend upon it.

The significant thing about the whole adjustment program is that through it the farmers are becoming alert to the needs of the time; they are orienting themselves with the national and world situation; and they are striving hard to fit themselves into whatever plans are necessary to give them what everyone wants first of all—a chance to make a living. In the county production-control associations they are forging an instrument which may, in the long view of history, be comparable to the democratic institutions set up by the early American colonists.

Walter R. Bishop, of Newton, Iowa, a corn-hog farmer and campaign worker, expressed it:

"This program, and this type of organization, are a little complicated, and hard for the farmers to grasp. But they're taking it mighty seriously. It's what they've long been dreaming of."

